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March 1962 Natural
History
Reviews

The legion of erroneous statements in the text permits mention of only a few samples. The author states, early in the work, that a body would weigh about 11 per cent more at the North Pole than the Equator, owing to the difference centrifugal force produced by the Two views of our land's rotation. Actually, the increase in

THE CONTINENT WE LIVE ON, by Ivan T. Sanderson. Random House, $20.00; 300 pp., illus. OUR NATIONAL PARK POLICY, by John Ise. The Johns Hopkins Press, $10.00; 701 pp.

URING THE PAST TWO DECADES, the D phrases "population explosion" and "urban sprawl" have evolved from catch-words into accurate names for the results of human fertility, extended life expectancy, and the greater demand for individual living space. Simultaneously, there has developed an increasing number of proponents for the preservation of wilderness and natural areas, and for the enjoyment of open spaces in all types of parks, and other tracts kept free of houses, shopping centers, factories, and similar developments. Each day, however, such areas become scarcer and more expensive to acquire. Coupled with this increased interest in the conservation of open space and natural areas is a growing desire for knowledge about the location, the natural features, and the biota of such areas. Two recent books portray America's natural features from different viewpoints and through different mediums. John Ise, Professor Emeritus at the University of Kansas, makes a realistic

and somewhat pessimistic analysis of the establishment, evolution, and future of our greatest system of preserved natural areas-our national parks-in a scholarly, well-documented book. This is an absorbing account both of the discovery and of the natural features of our various national parks and memorials, and of the struggles to acquire and maintain them.

In striking contrast to Dr. Ise's superb but unadorned text is the beautifully illustrated volume entitled The Continent We Live On. As an example of excellence in landscape and wildlife photography, combined with fine printing and craftsmanship, this volume is unsurpassed. Regrettably, the book is badly marred by its accompanying text -the work of Ivan T. Sanderson, who is rapidly rising to the office of high priest of nature fakers. His occasionally lucid but generally mediocre text is a case study in faulty interpretation, undocumented claims, fictitious awe, and totally unnatural history.

By JACK MCCORMICK

There is such a contrast in quality tween word and illustration that it is difficult to think of the volume as "I Sanderson's book." It is easier to believ that Random House has a conscientio picture editor who spent considerabl time locating and assembling some of the most outstanding landscape photograph available. To that anonymous individua much of the credit should be given fee the value of this book.

Generally, a reviewer welcomes the opportunity to compare the ideas of tw authors who are dealing with similar material. He can air their differences of opinion, and point pleasurably to co cepts about which they agree with or another-or with the reviewer. In the cas of these two books, however, such a con parison would be a travesty. The Co tinent We Live On, therefore, will sampled only briefly, so that some of th stimulating concepts in Our Nation Park Policy can be examined at lengt NE surprising aspect to be noted re garding the approximately 235 fine

photographs (of which 109 are in colori
is that only three have any discernab
trace of man or his artifacts. All t
others are unmarred by houses, powe
or charming
lines, vapor trails, highways,
models in bright clothing. Only a few
the photographs are obviously posed.
make use of dead, propped-up specime
or museum displays. (One example
the last-a picture of a jack rabbit-2
taken in The American Museum
Natural History, but it is not properl
captioned or credited.) As a result.
bulk of the pictures form a beautif
portfolio of America's natural landscap
which may justify purchase of the bo
Even Mr. Sanderson's introductor
remarks, however, indicate his lack
familiarity with his chosen subject. H
makes the baseless claim that "not ha
a dozen states... have so much as a ve
"To t
tation map of their territory.
reviewer, who presently is wilting
neath the burden of cataloguing
than a thousand published vegetati
maps of various parts of North Americ
this statement is ludicrous. Althoug
they vary in quality, scale, and conce;
such maps are available for every sta
and every portion of North America.
mu
right would be less than 0.4 per cent.
Again, he observes that an iceberg melts
zure rapidly below the water surface
than above, and therefore rises higher
the water as it melts. Anyone with an
elementary familiarity with Archimedes'
law would know this to be the reverse of
what occurs. Actually, an iceberg rises in
the water because its exposed surface
selts or abates more rapidly than its sub-
merged sections. As weight is removed
from above, the pressure of the water
Srces the ice upward until only enough
is beneath the water to displace a volume
of water with a weight equal to that of
the entire ice mass.
But there is more. Steam, it is said is
the gaseous phase of water, whereas
actually is a suspension of liquid drop-

The Laurentian Shield, the major
rologic feature of central and eastern
Canada, is termed a "horst," although
horst, by definition, is a vertically ele-
ated fault block. The Yukon's St. Elias
Range is modestly said to have a peak
devation of more than 18.000 feet; actu-
lly, its highest peak-Mt. Logan -reach-
a proud 19,850 feet. Glacier Bay is
eferred to as a National Park of 230.000
res, while in reality it is a National
Monument of nearly 2.300.000 acres. The
tallest redwood is said to have stood 340
ert in height, but the tallest known red-
d-the Founder's Tree-was 364 feet
when last measured, and is still growing.
Let us also select at random a few
amples of Mr. Sanderson's unnatural
story. We learn at the master's knee
at the major glacial periods were not
es when ice moved over the land, but
hen, instead, "the land must have
oved in and out under the polar ice....'
Another bit of lore, designed to awe the
wary reader, relates that desert plants
have developed" spines for the "pur-
of discharging surplus static elec-
tricity, thus becoming-according to the
thor-lightning rods in reverse. This
plains the "strange crackling sounds"
and the mysterious lights that people
ah Mr. Sanderson's imagination seem
one to encounter in the desert.
The usual errors in popularized nature
counts written by ill-informed or care-
authors also occur. Plants breathe
ough pores located on the underside
the leaves. Cacti are the dominant
plants of the desert and, if removed,
ld leave a barren or "sterile" void.
An ecologist, DR. MCCORMICK is with
both the Botany and Polar Research
Departments at Ohio State University.
The reader should al
Sanderson's glossary
rors, a saprophyte
"A plant that grow
parasitic on another
In addition to its
the text of The Cont
inappropriate. Altho
posedly designed as

natural landscapes o
goodly portion of th
the illustrations are
the mammals of No
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derson is more accus
mammals than geolo
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humanoid creatures
Mr. Sanderson's pre
roaming undiscovere
ern wildernesses, fin

The reader should also be cautious of Mr. Sanderson's glossary. Among other errors, a saprophyte is there defined as "A plant that grows upon but is not parasitic on another plant."

In addition to its mistakes, much of the text of The Continent We Live On is inappropriate. Although the book is supposedly designed as a description of the natural landscapes of North America, a goodly portion of the text and many of the illustrations are devoted entirely to the mammals of North America. However, it must be conceded that Mr. Sanderson is more accustomed to discussing mammals than geologic processes, landscapes, and vegetation patterns. It is at least a relief to find that the strange. humanoid creatures which, according to Mr. Sanderson's previous writings, are roaming undiscovered through our western wildernesses, find no mention here.